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## Writing/righting Palestine studies: settler colonialism, indigenous sovereignty and resisting the ghost(s) of history

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### ABSTRACT

This essay explores the limitations of a settler colonial analysis in writing Palestinian history. While the past decade has witnessed a plethora of interventions exploring this very concept, this essay attempts to layout the evolution of the concept within the literature on Palestine. In doing so, the utility of a settler-colonial analysis will become clearer and more substantially grounded in the discursive differences between literatures on Palestine and literatures on Zionism. This distinction between literature on Palestine and literature on Zionism is an important line to draw in the midst of a violent matrix that includes the on-going Zionist settler colonial occupation of Palestine. The essay suggests that Palestine studies should refer to Indigenous studies. It argues that while the settler-colonial analysis is fitting for the study of Zionism as an ideology and its history, frameworks that grew out of Indigenous studies are a more fitting political and academic home for the study of Palestinian history.

### KEYWORDS

Palestine; indigeneity;  
Zionism; native; settler;  
sovereignty

In 1965, the Research Center of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, published Fayeze A. Sayegh's *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*.<sup>1</sup> Sayegh arguably wrote what to this day is the most succinct piece of scholarship on Zionist settler colonialism. Sayegh's study is both from a Palestinian perspective and, even more importantly perhaps, written with a clear political purpose within a clear political frame. Speaking from and within the internationalist perspective of a proud Third World movement, Sayegh laid out a political and historical account of the settler colonial invasion of Palestine. He traced the history of the Zionist movement and its crimes on the native land and to the native bodies. Mindful of imperialism, Sayegh also framed his argument within the political context of resistance and liberation.

Flash forward five decades later and one finds a growing body of new scholarly literature that examines Zionism within the settler colonial framework. This phenomenon has now become a fully fledged and prolific school of analysis.<sup>2</sup> Neither the description nor the analysis is new to Palestinian historical literature, but this most recent wave has been perceived as a new kind of scholarly mode. In connection to recent studies that use the framework, there is also work that criticize the use of this analytic – that is, the actual use of a settler-colonial framework in Israel/Palestine. Since a great deal of work

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has been done on this topic, I do not presume to either re-do this work or even add to it.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of Sayegh's work, here I want to simply ask a question about these lines of inquiry: how can a settler-colonial analysis be part of a deeply political scholarly mode of indigenous resistance in Palestine?

In order to understand the complexities involved in such a question, I will critically read through some of the important key issues regarding using a settler colonial studies analytic in Palestine and see how, regardless of intentions, employing the analytic can and has led to a Zionist centered reading of the narrative of Palestine. Taking off from this point, this article then explores the possibilities of understanding Palestinian indigeneity (which involves a reading of settler colonialism *within* a Palestinian narrative). This approach will offer us a way to read Palestinians as the makers of Palestinian history as opposed to Palestinians as a part of a Zionist narrative.

### Settler-colonialism in Palestine: triumph or defeat?

Lorenzo Veracini – one of the most productive scholars within settler-colonial studies of/ on Israel/Palestine – argued that one of the great benefits of the use of the analysis is about tenses.<sup>4</sup> Patrick Wolfe, known for his own prior intervention regarding verb tenses,<sup>5</sup> also called for a deeper and more critical understanding of the process and structures of settler-colonialism to better appreciate Zionist actions and intentions in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> Both Wolfe and Veracini, within their respective specific understandings of settler colonialism, achieve a deeper understanding of Zionist claims of indigeneity. Both have clearly and consistently rejected those claims – and both have been the most cited sources in the most recent wave of employing the settler colonialism analytic in Palestine.

In 'The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation', Veracini's reading of settler colonialism in Palestine promotes a division I, however, question.<sup>7</sup> He follows Zionist history to find a break in settler colonialism between 1948 and 1967. Specifically, he asserts that the 1948 boundary is a case of settler colonialism whereas the Occupied Territories conquered by war in 1967 are viewed by him as a 'failure' of the Zionist settler colonial project. Specifically, the occupation of Palestinian lands after 1967, according to him, 'involves a transition from a system of relationships that can be understood as *settler colonial* to a relational system crucially characterized by *colonial forms*'.<sup>8</sup> In this analysis, the difference then produced by the war in 1967 was that the Zionist project went from eliminating the entire native people to controlling those who remained. Veracini claims, that 'the "classic" model of settler colonialism (i.e. where the indigenous population has been reduced to a manageable remnant), does not apply in the 1967 territories' as it does, according to him, in the part of Palestine conquered in 1948.<sup>9</sup> This problematic conclusion leads me to challenge Veracini's reading of settler colonialism and the Zionist project. How is it that Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1967 are not part of the settler colonial project? Moreover, because of the way he casts settler colonial projects in terms of 'triumph', some of Veracini's rhetorical divisions end up mirroring Zionist settler conquest and come eerily close to the Zionist narratives that treat 1948 and 1967 lands as two distinct areas rather than part of the whole of Palestine, albeit fragmented by the violence of the state of Israel. In fact, in this division, he seems to be neglecting a key element in understanding the settler colonial context, which is the demographics of elimination – still very much at play in all fragmented parts of Palestine. It is not that settler colonial aims do not exist in

the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, it is simply that the context differs – precisely because of the sheer number of Palestinians still present. The methods of elimination differ accordingly, yet still constitute what Wolfe has theorized as ‘structural genocide’.

How then are the actions of the Israeli state in all the geographies of Palestine not part and parcel of the structures, albeit in different intonations, of settler colonialism? How can Palestinians see any part of Zionist settler colonialism as a success and, as such, the end of their own story? The implications of settler colonialism ‘triumph’ are vast: the end of an on-going Palestinian narrative, presence and future. Zionist settler colonialism has, obviously, adopted and evolved over the course of building and maintaining of the Zionist state power in all geographies of historic Palestine. Furthermore, the Zionist quest toward indigeneity has manifested itself in terms of violence upon the Palestinian people in all of these geographies. According to Veracini:

In theoretical terms, one crucial distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism as separate formations is that the first aims to perpetuate itself whereas the latter aims to supersede itself. The difference is absolutely critical: while a colonial society is successful only if the separation between colonizer and colonized is retained, a settler colonial project is ultimately successful only when it *extinguishes* itself – that is, when the settler cease to be defined as such and become ‘natives’, and their position becomes normalized.<sup>10</sup>

But do settlers ever actually become native? From an indigenous political perspective this answer is clear: never.<sup>11</sup> Though Veracini does not claim that Zionist settlers have successfully indigenized, I argue that the actual approach or paradigm of success and defeat is (directly or indirectly) informed by the settler narrative. Though Veracini’s analysis can be read as an attempt to see a failure in Zionist settler-colonialism and potential promise for Palestinian self-determination, it still misses the mark when looked at from the perspective of the Palestinian people holding fast to national sovereignty in all of the land of Palestine. Hence, this labeling of that which is a defeat and a success might not be the most productive use of a settler colonial analysis. This problematic, then, compels me to raise the question of how a look at the indigenous Palestinian narrative of history might reveal something else – epistemologically and historiographically.

### **‘Triumph’ as the defeat of indigeneity**

Reproducing this paradigm of success and defeat is exactly what others have done in the exploration of settler colonialism as a tool of comparative analysis in Palestine. In a recent article, Nadim Rouhana also explores settler colonialism through this paradigm. His concepts of settler colonial ‘citizens’ and the interpretation of homeland nationalism as a main mode of Palestinian resistance to settler colonial violence are necessary and bold new explanations of Zionist settler colonialism and Palestinian resistance.<sup>12</sup> However, Rouhana frames his discussion of settler colonialism within a curious paradigm: ‘my point of departure theorizes Zionism and the state of Israel through a settler-colonial frame, but not as a “triumphed” settler project’.<sup>13</sup> To develop the distinction between triumph and failure, Rouhana cites Mahmoud Mamdani’s work on the history of race and conquest in the United States as his particular reading of settler colonial origins and frameworks. Deeply concerned with liberalism in the United States, Mamdani argues that historians have elided the native question:

Unlike all previous exclusions – ethnicity, race, and gender – the native question would provide a far more fundamental challenge to the celebration of citizenship in America. Engaging with the native question would require questioning the ethics and politics of the very constitution of the United States of America. It would require rethinking and reconsidering the very political project called the USA. Indeed, it would call into question the self-proclaimed anticolonial identity of the US. Highlighting the colonial nature of the American political project would require a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of America, one necessary to think through both America's place in the world and the rate of political reform for future generations.<sup>14</sup>

Since the foundational mythology of the United States is one that recasts settler versus native as a contest between civilized and savage,<sup>15</sup> native exclusion in discussions about citizenship rights was normalized.<sup>16</sup>

Within this framework, Mamdani also relies on a paradigm of triumph and failure. Irrespective of how useful his comparison between US and Israeli settler colonialism is, his rhetorical use of this model problematically perpetuates a false divide of success and defeat, much like the division that Veracini also advances. In 2005, after a trip to Birzeit University in occupied Palestine, Mamdani returned

convinced that apartheid South Africa was not a fitting lens through which to understand Israel. I thought settler America would provide a more illuminating parallel. As in North America, the settler in Israel is not interested in Palestinians as a source of labor; he or she wants their land. Zionists in Israel have long drawn inspiration from how America cleansed the land of Indians.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the genocidal violence perpetuated by the United States against indigenous peoples served as a model for Zionists in Palestine. Mamdani brilliantly states that settler colonialism in both geographies is driven by a sense of divine right.

As clear as Mamdani is here, the point of departure for him (the point that Rouhana framed his own analysis upon) is far less convincing. The limits of this parallel for Mamdani have to do with the contemporary times – native elimination *happened* (past tense) in the United States – a 'completed' story with a known outcome where the indigenous peoples are remembered (if at all) only in their death and ultimate destruction. With the obvious exception for the demographic difference (which obviously perpetuates the idea of settler success), the style and motivation for conquest in both geographies, while separated by more than a century of history, are both part of a larger settler colonial project that grew out of modern European history. And are both – albeit with different details – on-going.

Though not completely throwing away the present-ness of the native question in the United States, Mamdani dares his reader to imagine a decolonization process in the United States and how that process would work. Mamdani's argument is an investigation about the origins and structures of modern state and institutions. As a means of establishing awareness and coming to terms with the question of origins in a 'successful' settler society, the role of the native is relegated to a symbol – a means to salvage the ethics of the settler in creating a democratic society. This ethical discussion is not about returning native lands nor is it even about recognition of native rights, but rather is an ethical reckoning of the state with its bloody past to create a more just settler society. But why is the role of the native here merely symbolic one? And once again, why is the story still focused on and about the settler?

While the comparisons of various locations of settler colonialism is a rich and growing field, it seems clear that emphasizing settler triumph or native defeat is neither historically sound nor politically valuable. But this is not just about terms. More importantly, this is also about politics, a political project and goals of social justice and liberation. That is when the use of a settler colonial studies analytic within the larger framework of indigeneity becomes our collective political project. Put in more clear terms, this is where scholars can use settler colonialism as a useful method of analysis *within* the larger project of indigenous studies. Seen in this light, comparative analysis can become shared political projects – where reading and mis-reading triumph and defeat are neither productive nor entirely accurate – and difference in context or specific sites can actually lead to a more fruitful shared political project. Without this political vision, these two major concerns (victory and being vanquished) for many of those who use settler colonial frameworks become misleadingly (though perhaps not intentionally) tied in with a reductive analysis.

### Settler colonialism as the basis for Zionist/Israeli studies

In 2015, Gabriel Piterberg published a useful and overarching analysis of the growing literature on settler colonialism as an analytic in Israel/Palestine. Piterberg traces the work and impact of Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir as part of an ‘insular examination of Israeli scholarship’ through which he ‘gauges the impact on the growing presence of the settler colonial paradigm in Israeli scholarship’.<sup>18</sup> That is, like others before him, Piterberg focused on the evolution of the settler colonial framework in the study of Israel/Zionism. This makes perfect sense in this context, as Piterberg focuses on Israeli academia, finding the influences that paved the way for Israeli scholars to generally employ the language of colonialism and for those more recently willing to apply the language of settler colonialism to describe the Zionist confiscation of Palestine.

As Piterberg rightly noted in his summary of the ‘new’ Israeli historiography, they were not really ‘new’ and most certainly did not use (nor even claim to use) a new methodology. In fact, the bulk of this self-described ‘new history’ relied on traditional political and military history based exclusively on archival sources. In his useful criticism of this ‘new school’, Piterberg claims that, ‘it is rarely asked in precisely what sense their historiography challenges Zionism and Zionist scholarship;’ perhaps it is more appropriate to qualify this by saying that – outside of Palestinian historians – this was a rarely asked question. Within the rubric of Palestinian history and historiography, the claims made by this school (in particular the details of the *Nakba* War of 1947–1949) were well-explored details of Palestinian dispossession.<sup>19</sup> So, again, the absence of the Palestinian voice is reminiscent of the elimination of the Palestinian body – Zionist settler colonialism functions on the land and in the scholarship.

What is important is an interrogation of positionality that speaks to the overall theme of this essay: an Israeli voice or Zionist perspective challenging the Zionist mythology of state formation was new only to people who ignored Palestinian voices who had always been writing in that vein. Herein it is clear there are at least two approaches to writing Palestinian history, one that involves a silencing or complete ignorance of Palestinian voices and relying on Zionist frameworks and conceptualizations, and one that is simultaneously a writing and a righting of Palestinian history through purposely elevating Palestinian indigenous experiences and narrative.

The work of Palestinians, unlike that of these ‘new’ historians, also utilized the tools and language of a settler colonial studies. What was ‘new’, however, was that these long-established conclusions (long-established through the rigorous work of Palestinian historians) regarding Zionist motivations, planning and settler-colonial design were new only to those working *within* a Zionist framework. Rightly, Piterberg notes: ‘the absence of conceptual newness or radical critique overwrites variations in political affiliation and extra scholarly pronouncements’.<sup>20</sup> As celebrated as these historians have been, given this critique, it seems that the settler-colonial analytic must also include reading silence in both the physical sense of indigenous elimination as well as in the suppression and purposeful absence of indigenous voices. If these historians – and those who idealized them – read or comprehensively engaged with Palestinian historians (or Palestinian voices in general), their claims of ‘newness’ would have most certainly been qualified if not entirely debunked.<sup>21</sup> Only when they silenced and ignored Palestinian voices did the work of these historians achieve the status of novelty and academic and political following.

### The importance of positionality

This is where perhaps we can now – as Piterberg did in his essay – turn to the work of Patrick Wolfe. His scholarship on settler colonialism and his contributions to the scholarly field, along with his erudite and extensive work on applying the comparative components of settler colonialism provide an opportunity to further analyze both the potential and the limitations of using the settler colonial studies analytic in Palestine. I would like to focus here on how he saw the limitations of the work and how he clearly and with rare humility understood what positionality and analysis meant to indigenous lives under the brutality of settler colonialism.

Just a few months before his untimely death, Patrick Wolfe visited Palestine and spoke in several indigenous venues including Birzeit University and Mada al-Carmel. He prefaced his talks and presentations with this key understanding of positionality – his own as a white settler in Australia and that of comparative theorists, in general, with a keen understanding of the political and moral struggle involved in an on-going battle against settler colonial dispossession and violence. It is worth noting that Wolfe understood that his voice was that of a settler – with all the power dynamics involved in it.<sup>22</sup> Rather than implementing a patronizing position offering advice to the natives, Wolfe understood his role as one of a scholar primarily recording the oppression as well as clearly positioning himself and his scholarship in direct opposition to the violence implemented on native peoples through a history of settler colonialism in various geographies.

In order to examine the historical literature of settler colonialism, it is important to understand the role of the scholar in a settler colonial context. Wolfe described this scholarly relationship through his understanding of positionality within the Australian context:

Where survival is a matter of not being assimilated, positionality is not just central to the issue – it *is* the issue. In a settler-colonial context, the question of who speaks goes far beyond liberal concerns with equity, dialogue or access to the academy. Claims to authority over indigenous discourse made from within the settler-colonial academy necessarily participate in the continuing usurpation of indigenous space (invasion is a structure not an event).<sup>23</sup>

Wolfe understood that power in settler colonial terms manifested itself in various forms including in scholarship. In fact, Veracini explained the main difference between his approach to settler colonialism and that of Wolfe's: 'Basically, in my thinking, settler colonialism was like a waltz, a three-step dance involving settlers, indigenous peoples and exogenous others; for him (Wolfe) it was like a salsa involving indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.'<sup>24</sup> This binary is as much about how Wolfe understood settler societies as it is about how to resist them. It is the politics of positionality.

As Edward Said first introduced in *Orientalism*, this question of positionality and location as privilege is a foundational aspect of not only understanding Orientalism as a core component in the production of knowledge – but also knowledge production in the larger context of Euro-centric modernity as a part of literature on coloniality and, subsequently, a crucial question in the literature on postcoloniality. As Wolfe reminds his readers in his introduction to *The Settler Colonial Complex: Recuperating Binarism in Colonial Studies*, 'colonial subjectivities are inescapably bound up in the wider field of identity politics, ultimately in the intense classificatory contestation over positionality: who are the settlers, and where does that leave everyone else?'<sup>25</sup> The hegemonic presence of the settler on the land is again mirrored as a hegemony embedded within the primary placement of the settler in scholarly literature. Like the attempted erasure of the indigenous presence on the land, this settler dominated framework in the scholarship is the attempted devaluation and eventual erasure of the Native history of and presence on the land.

This seems a central feature in the context of understanding Wolfe's later argument toward, in his words, 'recuperating binarism' in colonial studies. The relationship between native and settler is a structural one that is the enduring binary in the Native/settler divide. Toward this end, Wolfe reminds his reader of the importance of 'the frontier [...] as a way of talking about the historical process of territorial invasion – a cumulative deprecation through which outsiders recurrently advance on Natives in order to take their place'.<sup>26</sup> By focusing on the frontier as both a concept and a violent reality, it is important to identify the primary 'binary': settler and native. To obfuscate this through whatever theoretical or political means would be to erase and completely abandon not only the brutal, on-going reality of settler-colonialism, but also to potentially de-politicize scholarship. This kind of qualification in the righting/writing of Palestinian history is of paramount importance and the basic point of this essay. Again, to return to Wolfe's articulation of mirroring of settler colonial violence and the relationship between settler and native in the scholarship:

It is naïve, if not consciously complicit, for academic discourse to recapitulate multiculturalism's claim to have subverted polar oppositions. Rather, multiculturalism maintains settler authorities' historical suppression of Indigenous specificity into the so-called postracist era. As we have seen, frontier history raises the question of when, if at all, the colonial binary became diluted or pluralized. Assimilationists have no such doubts. Rather than wondering whether or when the original binary might have become diluted, they want to know how it can be diluted in the present. In this total social situation, the matter goes to the core of the politics of academic representations.<sup>27</sup>

The frontier, then, represents the *on-going* violence of the structures of settler-colonialism. In what can be considered settler colonial invasion, Wolfe describes the frontier as the initial stage by which later stages must be read: 'when invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop – or, more to the point, become relatively



trivial – when it moves on from the era of frontier homicide’.<sup>28</sup> For Wolfe, the current Palestinian condition is a typical case of frontier settler colonialism, ‘since Israel/Palestine remains locked in a frontier situation, a particularly wide range of settler-colonial modalities co-exist simultaneously’.<sup>29</sup> Rather than success/defeat – the idea of a permanent frontier as Wolfe describes it here is the key to establishing the comparison between indigenous experience in Palestine and elsewhere. My point here, then, is not that settler colonial studies is not useful (since it is productive), but that the language of triumph and failure is not only less productive, it privileges the history and historical narratives of the settlers. This also happens to be limited in political terms since it promotes settler success and/or failure over Indigenous resistance. Therein, perhaps lies the key – the violence of the frontier has both settler violence and native resistance.

### From settler vision to indigenous intervention

This line of thought regarding the frontier is a rich field in settler colonial studies but, like the settler colonial studies analytic, not without its own limitations. Indigeneity must be the frame of how we read settler colonial studies. According to Jodi Byrd, ‘one of the lasting questions about the significance of the frontier whether to American or transnational history is the agency and authority indigenous peoples have to intervene in or theorize differently the violences of empire’.<sup>30</sup> Byrd continues:

One of the challenges facing indigenous studies in conversation with settler colonial studies and frontier histories is to resist the continual prioritizing of an effect for a cause, of requiring the settler and the frontier rather than the indigenous as the structuring analytic through which to assess the consequences of colonialism.<sup>31</sup>

So the question then becomes: how can a settler colonial studies analysis contribute to an indigenous analysis while not becoming the central focus of the narrative? In other words, how can indigeneity benefit from and not be overtaken by a settler colonial analysis?

To bring this back once again to Palestine, the complications involved in the literature notwithstanding, the scholarship that abstracts or avoids or outright denies the primary and enduring Native/settler divide must be read as a blatant denial of native histories and indigenous sovereignty. Because, as Wolfe suggests, binaries produce ‘settler anxiety’: binaries signal ‘incompleteness’.<sup>32</sup> This notion of permanent incompleteness, perhaps even more than the structure and the event, is key to understanding how best to utilize the analytic. Settler-colonialism understood in this way is never complete. This perspective also creates more concrete rhetorical and political lines of comparative indigenous experience. The question then becomes, as Byrd referred to and as Wolfe himself noted:

How, then, is a settler colonial critique to maintain this binary without casting Indigeneity as a reflex product of conquest, forever dependent on the settler initiative? Historically, Native and settler have indeed been rendered mutually dependent like Hegel’s master and slave, by virtue of conquest. In addition to characterizing the past and the present, however, does our recognition of the structural continuity of settler colonialism predetermine the future? Could it be that our deconstruction of settler discourse actually reconstructs it?<sup>33</sup>

In fact, in defense of the binary that he so clearly identified, Wolfe reveals what might lie beneath the political surface in rejections of binarism in settler societies:

As one who argues that settler colonialism is premised on a zero-sum logic whereby settler societies, for all their internal complexities, uniformly require the elimination of Native alternatives, I have regularly been accused of binarism – though not once by a Native. Why should it be that the spectre of binarism, so disturbing to non-Native sensibilities, should be less troubling to Natives?<sup>34</sup>

In their well-known critique of settler-colonialism as a specific political formation, Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch frame their discussion in a similar way and emphasize positionality:

while this movement may be animated by and in sympathy with major developments in critical Indigenous theory and global Indigenous activism, settler colonial theory (STC) remains a largely White attempt to think through contemporary colonial relationships.<sup>35</sup>

This concern can translate into the Palestinian scene as a political, ethical and scholarly mode as well as through a similar reading of the temporality of settler colonialism. Given their understanding of the potential for settler colonial theory to disrupt settler temporalities (through a constant focus on the continuous and contemporary nature of settler colonialism), this can also relate back to the notion of endings – settler colonialism can strive for triumph through the elimination of the native, but in this sense – it will never triumph.<sup>36</sup> This nuance can help us understand shared indigenous commonalities.

### Toward an indigenous critique of settler colonialism

In a position paper titled ‘Settler Colonial Studies and Native American and Indigenous Studies’ Robert Warrior examined the proliferation of sessions on settler colonial studies over and above those focused on Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) within the context of the American Studies Association.<sup>37</sup> He lamented that some scholars in the field of American Studies have taken settler colonial studies and NAIS to be one and the same. Thus, Warrior argued that a focus on settler colonialism privileges the settler position and serves to obscure the work of NAIS, which centers on the endurance of indigenous peoples, including their knowledge, sovereignty, and resistance. Warrior, then, offers us an opportunity to realign our understanding of settler colonialism within an indigenous framework, thereby placing the analytic in a political, epistemological and historiographical trajectory that does not become an obstacle for indigenous voices and refuses the re-telling and re-entrenchment of settler narratives.

As Warrior explained in his presentation:

For many of us in Indigenous studies, a primary scholarly value is the consideration and privileging of a local Indigenous history and the forging of bonds between that sort of locality and the history and experience of other Indigenous peoples.<sup>38</sup>

Warrior coherently asks the questions that lie at the heart of the intellectual production of indigeneity. Speaking about the specifics regarding the intellectual, cultural and political space of American Studies, Warrior expresses his growing anxiety with the effect settler colonial studies has on Indigenous studies. The challenge becomes, for Warrior, to reflect on ‘the context in which that theorizing takes place’. Though these are questions that Warrior has studied over the course of decades of work within and commitment to the American Studies Association, I think this anxiety speaks directly to similar anxieties about the writing/righting of Palestinian narratives. The challenges Warrior addressed

led to the collective creation of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) to create a space that elevates indigenous voices as well as provides a political and scholarly context for Native theorizing.<sup>39</sup> That Palestinian voices and contexts have been a part of the annual meeting of NAISA since its founding speaks volumes about the connections and intersections within indigenous studies as a discipline and a methodology.<sup>40</sup>

Toward an understand of the methodological implications of indigenous studies, Warrior calls for 'intellectual sovereignty'. In *Tribal Secrets*, Warrior establishes a clear line of thinking wherein we can see that the settler colonial studies analytic can be utilized within the larger framework of indigenous sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> This framework is clearly established in the third chapter under the title 'Intellectual Sovereignty and the Struggle for an American Indian Future'. Here Warrior argues that the 'process of sovereignty provides a way of envisioning the work we do', thereby offering us a potential framework that takes into account the settler colonial studies analytic and the Native/settler binary as one of many points of departure in a larger quest toward indigenous knowledge production.

Warrior's call outlines a trajectory for politically motivated intellectual work:

What is now critical for American Indian intellectuals committed to sovereignty is to realize that we, too, must struggle for sovereignty, *intellectual sovereignty*, and allow the definition and articulation of what that means to emerge as we critically reflect on that struggle.<sup>42</sup>

Through his analysis of the production of critical literature, Warrior notes that critique remains the domain of non-Natives:

a growing number of American Indian intellectuals are realizing that the American Indians must produce criticism as well as literature if the work of Native poets and novelists is not to become merely one more part of American Indian existence to be dissected and divvied up between white 'experts'.<sup>43</sup>

Not to be confused with liberal identity politics, Warrior's call develops frameworks and methodology that can empower Palestinians toward righting/writing history, a history liberated from the hegemonic frameworks that have long confined the indigenous voices of Palestine within at best a mode of response to and at worse a mode of collaboration with the dominating ideology of Zionist settler colonialism.

Intellectual sovereignty, as I have defined it, would provide [...] a way of recognizing the important influences of economics, gender, and the politics of publishing and the academy, but would not automatically dismiss someone because of such influences [...] In doing so, though, we must go beyond merely invoking categories and engage in careful exploration of how those categories impact the process of sovereignty. In doing do, we would have to ask not only how anti-colonial economic categories describe American Indian experience, but also how they do not. We would also want to inquire into how this sort of criticism has shown itself to be limited in post-colonial situations.<sup>44</sup>

This call can as easily be made of the literature on and about Palestine – still so profoundly dominated by the hegemony of Zionist frameworks. Even at its best, the historiography on Palestine is often stuck in the discursive maze of countering Zionist ideology and obtaining a *permission* to narrate for Palestinian subjects of Zionist violence. Warrior's call is clearly a political call to arms via the work of moving toward intellectual sovereignty as a framework for remembering as well as writing history as an oppressed people:

If our struggle is anything it is the struggle for sovereignty and if sovereignty is anything it is a way of life. That way of life is not a matter of defining a political ideology or having a detached discussion about the unifying structures and essences of American Indian traditions. It is a decision, a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process [...]. Such a praxis leads us into life in the face of death and teaches us that our knowledge can never predict the future nor ossify the past. The value in our work then expresses itself in the constant struggle to understand what it is we can do rather than in telling people what they should do. As much as the revolutionary or grassroots organizer, we are inserted into the life of a people and our work grows from the same landscape as does theirs.<sup>45</sup>

Many scholars have engaged with this call in both direct and indirect ways.<sup>46</sup> My question remains in this essay: can the historiography – or more appropriately – the historians of Palestine move toward a framework of indigenous intellectual sovereignty and write/right Palestinian history?

### Return to Palestine through indigenous intellectual sovereignty

Appreciating the true nature of the historiography and literature on Palestine is important to develop a more organic history of the country.

In 'A Structure, Not an Event: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity', J. Kehaulani Kauanui expands on Warrior's inquiry and challenge by detailing how settler colonial studies as an analytic can too easily lend itself to potential misuse when indigeneity is left out of the frame. She insists that settler colonialism as an analytic must stand in relation to indigeneity. I propose that this understanding of indigeneity can help understanding how Zionism frameworks persistently eclipse Palestinian narratives. The danger of eclipsing is constant, though it may not be the intention of settler colonial studies. Jean O'Brien also asked a basic question about unintentional consequences in reference to the use of the settler colonial studies analytic. In spite of all that is offered in understanding the logics of elimination within the settler colonial studies analytic, O'Brien spoke of her concern that the indigenous voice and narrative drops from the narrative.<sup>47</sup> O'Brien – like others – worried that as important as the analytic has been, it still offers little means to understanding the history of Indigenous resistance.

Here I suggest the pertinence of bringing the discussion of settler colonialism in relation to NAIS into a discussion on Zionist settler colonialism in relation to Palestine. Steven Salaita's work offers one of the most formative bridges here. He reads 'indigenous' as a political category. Salaita takes off from a point of comparison, but one that focuses on indigenous voices not as a complement to settler narratives but in direct political opposition to them. His scholarly project is a political cry that forces the reader to understand indigeneity as a categorical link joining the geographies of North American and Palestine.

Salaita – taking up Warrior's call – has focused on how to write Palestine within Indigenous studies. Salaita connects the ethical tenets put forth by Indigenous studies as the means for inter/cultural work among Native American Studies and Palestine Studies.<sup>48</sup> This project challenges not only traditional settler privilege but also how we approach scholarship as activism within our ethical framework. The cultural connections he explores can be seen as comparative indigeneity – with a shared political cause: self-determination and liberation. The shared relationship between Native and American studies and between Palestine and Middle Eastern studies is 'the resistance of the two groups to

traditional taxonomical models of scholarship' whereby 'resistance often arises from a principled ethical position' that argues that 'Native Studies must be performed from within geographies of self-determination.'<sup>49</sup> A scholarly project is a political project from within a communal space: therefore, as Salaita eloquently put it: 'I cannot think of two groups better suited than Natives and Palestinians to speak back to history, together'.<sup>50</sup>

In focusing on indigenous voices we find resistance to settler colonial frameworks and, through the clear articulation of this resistance, an indigenous reading of settler colonialism is brought about. Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh in *Qalb al Himar* (The Donkey's Heart) also screams eloquently at the audacity and pure absurdity of life under barbaric settler violence.<sup>51</sup> In his unique writing style, al-Shaikh finds a way to produce a counter narrative of the life of war criminal Ariel Sharon and to eloquently mock those who rely on colonial law to produce justice for Palestinians. Not a traditional an historian, al-Shaikh clearly understands that the work of seeking justice within settler frameworks (including scholarly ones) is doomed to always be an effort in vain for Palestinians. Writing as an indigenous scholar, in referring to the crimes of Sharon, Al-Shaikh *screams* 'to the skies [...] as if the denial of justice was not enough, [our] disappearance was itself vanquished'.<sup>52</sup> Since so much settler Zionist literature has been fully embedded within the tainted legal frameworks of colonial modernity, al-Shaikh turns the tables on the settler and imagines a mythical trial where Sharon – through his own words – essentially puts himself on trial. The world of the mythical and the absurd is the refuge of the indigenous voice, but through his linguistic and theoretical weaving, al-Shaikh provides us with what indigeneity is for Palestinians. He asks: how and what kind of justice can be served when the criminal defines the crime? Only in the hands of a Palestinian indigenous scholar can such a framework provide us with an insight into both how Palestinian voices freely function and how these voices can truly be liberated from settler colonial frameworks.<sup>53</sup>

To write in a Palestinian voice, like al-Shaikh, also requires listening to Palestinian voices. In the late 1990s, Rosemary Sayigh gave an interview where she spoke about the span of her career and reflected on the power of voices. In this interview she revealed what perhaps many in her generation experienced: they were writing about Palestine and Palestinians – telling a story and not theorizing.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Sayigh clearly makes the point that indigenous history is told and that, when asked, women are the great storytellers. It is well known, after all, that Sayigh used the word 'elimination' in the early 1970s long before this recent wave of settler colonial studies interest in Palestine.<sup>55</sup> It is not a contest though; it is a question of frameworks and how those frameworks can be employed toward elevating indigenous scholarship and furthering indigenous intellectual sovereignty.

Perhaps the most useful example of this can be seen, as I have mentioned in this article's opening, in the extraordinary work of Faye A. Sayegh. *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* appeared in 1965. A political mission seemed clearer to people then. One must ask: why was the settler colonial studies analytic so clearly within a political program of indigenous intellectual sovereignty then? Why was this mission so thoroughly buried in so much of the work on Zionist settler colonialism in Palestinian history in the last decade?

The answer might be that strong indigenous voices are representative of a political, ethical, and scholarly program. Indigeneity is a political category. Like Indigenous studies elsewhere, Palestinian Indigenous Studies is about Palestinian narratives of resistance to imperial and settler colonial powers.

For example, in my own current work on the history of the Palestinian *Nakba*, I have come to understand the uses and limitations of understanding settler colonial elimination.

Written outside of a framework of Indigenous resistance, the story of the *Nakba* is one of endings: the story of the making of a refugee population and the memory of what Palestine once was – as opposed to being the story framed around the return of refugees and Palestinian resistance. The settler colonial studies analytic is fundamental to understand this ('structure not an event' is what Palestinians always understood as on-going *Nakba*) – but it is not the main focus. Therein lies the difference between a settler narrative and indigenous narrative. It is more than a question of audience; if settler colonial studies is about success and failure, it is a settler narrative. But, if it is about indigenous sovereignty – Palestinian resistance and endurance – then any given analysis of settler colonialism is situated within that framework.

## Notes

1. Fayez A. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Beirut: Palestinian Liberation Organization, Research Center, 1965).
2. While this list is long, it reflects a selection of some of the pieces discussed in this essay: David Lloyd, 'Settler-Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel', *Settler-Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1: 59–80; Mahmud Mamdani, 'Settler-Colonialism Then and Now', *Critical Inquiry* 41; Nadim Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, 'Settler-Colonial Citizenship: Conceptualizing the Relationship between Israel and Its Palestinian Citizens', *Settler-Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3: 205–25; Nadim Rouhana, 'Homeland Nationalism and Guarding Dignity in a Settler-Colonial Context: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel Reclaim their Homeland', *Borderlands (E-Journal)* 14, no. 1 (2015); Neve Gordon and Moriel Ram, 'Ethnic Cleansing and the Formation of Settler Colonial Geographies', *Political Geography* no. 53 (2016): 20–9; Magid Shihade, 'Not Just a Picnic: Settler Colonialism, Mobility, and Identity among Palestinians in Israel', *Biography* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 451–73; Patrick Wolfe, 'Purchase by Other Means: The Palestinian Nakba and Zionism's Conquest of Economics', *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 133–71; Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; Lorenzo Veracini, 'The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel and the Occupation', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 26–42.
3. For a recent review of this critical mode see: Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziada, 'Acts and Omissions: Framing Settler Colonialism in Palestine Studies', *Jadaliyya*, January 14, 2016. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23569/acts-and-omissions\\_framing-settler-colonialism-in](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23569/acts-and-omissions_framing-settler-colonialism-in) (accessed January 14, 2016). See also Salem Walid, 'Jerusalem: Reconsidering the Settler Colonial Analysis', *Palestine – Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 21, no. 4 (2016): 21–7.
4. Lorenzo Veracini, 'What Can Settler Colonial Studies Offer to an Interpretation of the Conflict in Israel-Palestine', *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3 (2015): 268.
5. Wolfe specifically used to the term 'spilt tensing': 'Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure and not an event.' Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1999), 2.
6. Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010) and Patrick Wolfe's *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (1999) are formative texts on the current reading of settler colonialism in Palestine.
7. Lorenzo Veracini, 'The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel and The Occupation', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 26–42.
8. Veracini, 'The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel and The Occupation', 27.
9. *Ibid.*, 29.
10. *Ibid.*, 28.
11. Another way of dealing with this question is explored by Raef Zriek: Raef Zriek, 'When Does a Settler Become a Native?', *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (2016): 351–64.

12. Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, 'Settler-Colonial Citizenship: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Israel and its Palestinian Citizens', *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 205–25.
13. Nadim N. Rouhana, 'Homeland Nationalism and the Guarding Dignity in a Settler Colonial Context: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel Reclaim Their Homeland', 1.
14. Mahmood Mamdani, 'Settler Colonialism: Then and Now', 603.
15. As one example of this interrogation of traditional history see: Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). O'Brien beautifully shows the intricacies involved in the historical imagination and its work of elimination beyond the bloody confrontation of frontier violence.
16. Mahmood Mamdani, 'When Does a Settler Become Native? Reflections of the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa, Inaugural Lecture, Center for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 13 May 1998'. <http://citizenshiprightsafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/1998/05/mamdani-1998-inaugural-lecture.pdf> (accessed January 1, 2017). See also: Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
17. Mahmood Mamdani, 'Settler Colonialism: Then and Now', 611.
18. Gabriel Piterberg, 'Israeli Sociology's Young Hegelian: Gershon Shafir and the Settler-Colonial Framework', 17.
19. This list of titles is long here, but in particular see the plethora of work by both Walid Khalidi and Nur Masalha. For example see: Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought 1882–1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Nur Masalha. *A Land Without a People: Israel, Transfer, and the Palestinians, 1949–1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997); Nur Masalha. *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Nur Masalha. *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Population* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Nur Masalha. *The Palestinian Nakba: Decolonizing History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London: Zed Books, 2012); Walid Khalidi, ed. *All that Remains: The Palestinian Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington D.C.: Institute of Palestinian Studies, 2006); Walid Khalidi, ed. *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestinian Problem Until 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute Palestinian Studies, 1987).
20. Gabriel Piterberg, 'Israeli Sociology's Young Hegelian: Gershon Shafir and the Settler-Colonial Framework', 19.
21. As they were consistently and constantly by Palestinian historians (see the work of Nur Masalha).
22. This point – positionality and understanding settler privilege was and remains a key in how an anti-settler-colonial ethic can be established. See Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Cornstassel, 'Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32.
23. Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 3.
24. Lorenzo Veracini, 'Patrick Wolfe's Dialectics', *Aboriginal History* 40 (2016): 249–50.
25. Wolfe, *The Settler Colonial Complex*, 2.
26. Patrick Wolfe, 'Introduction', in *The Settler Complex: Recuperating Binarism in Colonial Studies*, ed. Patrick Wolfe (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 2016), 1.
27. Wolfe, *Settler Colonial Complex*, 5.
28. Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', 402.
29. Wolfe, 'Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction', 270.
30. Jodi A. Byrd, 'Follow the Typical Signs: Settler Sovereignty and its Discontents', *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 151.
31. *Ibid.*, 153.
32. Patrick Wolfe, 'Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction', *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, nos 3–4 (2013): 259.
33. Wolfe, 'Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction', 274.
34. *Ibid.*, 257.

35. Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch, 'The Ethical Demands of Settler-Colonial Theory', *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, nos 3–4 (2013): 426.
36. Macoun and Strakosch, 'The Ethical Demands of Settler-Colonial Theory', 434.
37. The roundtable where Warrior presented this paper also included Vicente M. Diaz, Glen Coulthard and Kehaulani Kauanui.
38. I am grateful to Robert Warrior for personally sharing a copy of his presentation at the ASA. Robert Warrior (Osage), 'Settler Colonial Studies and Native American and Indigenous Studies: A Position Paper' (Paper presented at the 2015 ASA annual conference).
39. The NAISA was initiated during an international conference in 2007. NAISA itself was established in 2008 at a founding conference. The first annual meeting of the new association, then, was in 2009. See <http://www.naisa.org/about-naisa.html>.
40. There have been over 10 papers and panel discussions about or including Palestine at NAISA since 2009.
41. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Vine Deloria, John Joseph Mathews, and the Recovery of American Indian Intellectual* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
42. Warrior, 'Intellectual Sovereignty and the Struggle for an American Indian Future', 6.
43. *Ibid.*, 9.
44. *Ibid.*, 11.
45. *Ibid.*, 18.
46. See, for example, Elvira Pulitano. *Towards a Native American Critical Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).
47. Jean M. O'Brien. 'Tracing Settler Colonialism in Eliminary Logic in *Traces of History*' (American Studies Association Annual Meeting, November 2016). [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vA80wkmZ\\_kQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vA80wkmZ_kQ) (accessed February 15, 2017).
48. Steven Salaita. *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2016).
49. Steven Salaita. "'The Ethics of Intercultural Approaches to Indigenous Studies' Conjoining Natives and Palestinians in Context', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 8.
50. Salaita, 'Ethics of Intercultural Approaches to Indigenous Studies', 11.
51. Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh, *Qalb al-Himār: Sharon bayna majāz al maḥkama wa maḥkamat al majāz* [The Donkey's Heart: Sharon's Mythical Trial] (Ramallah: Palestinian House of Poetry, 2007).
52. Al-Shaikh, *Qalb al-Himar*, page 47 (author's translation).
53. For an in-depth reading of Palestinian culture within settler colonial frameworks and Palestinian culture of liberation from them see: Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh, *Al Hawaya al Thaqafiyya al filistiniyyah: al mithal', al tamthil', wa al tamāthol'* [Palestinian Cultural Identity: the Model, the Representation, and the Summetry]', *Massarat*, January 2013.
54. Rosemary Sayigh, 'Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History', *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 42–58.
55. Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed, 2007).

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